DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 207 350 FL 012 554

TITLE	Ethiopians. Refugee Fact Sheet Series #1.
INSTITUTION	Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, D.C. Language and Orientation Resource Center.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Refugee Resettlement (DHHS), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	Jun 81
CONTRACT	600-78-0061
NOTE	19p.
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Amharic; *Cultural Background; English (Second Language); History; *Refugees; Semitic Languages
IDENTIFIERS	*Ethiopians; Fact Sheets

ABSTRACT

Hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians have been forced to flee their country by a repressive regime, a civil war, and an international conflict. These people inhabited a highland plateau cut by deep river valleys and bordered by seas, deserts, and jungles. Ethiopians have diverse backgrounds and speak many languages. Through their long history they have been largely free from outside domination, and have therefore developed a unique culture as evidenced by styles of food, dress, time measurement, and literature. Ethiopians in African refugee camps are for the most part illiterate and desperate. By contrast, the few thousand who have made their way to the United States are educated and anxious to get on with their lives. For all, however, the future is unknown. (Author)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED207350

Refugee Fact Sheet Series #1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Ethiopians

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Center for
Applied Linguistics

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Language and Orientation Resource Center
Center for Applied Linguistics
3520 Prospect Street, NW
Washington DC 20007
(800) 424-3750 (toll-free)
(800) 424-3701 (toll-free)
(202) 298-9292 (in Washington, D.C.)

June 1981

FL 012 554

Refugee Fact Sheet #1: Ethiopians

The purpose of the Refugee Fact Sheets is to provide background information on certain refugee groups that have recently arrived, and are still arriving, in the United States. Unlike the refugees from Indochina and the entrants from the Caribbean, these refugees have arrived in much smaller numbers; however, they still face many of the same problems with language, education, employment and cultural adjustment.

Each Fact Sheet is divided into approximately five sections: (1) general introduction; (2) cultural background; (3) educational background; (4) implications for learning English as a second language (ESL); and (5) implications for orientation. The cultural background section of each Fact Sheet is the most inclusive; it contains information on the history, geography, language, religion, food, values and customs of the specific refugee group.

We wish to thank all of those without whose research and assistance we would not have been able to put this Fact Sheet on Ethiopians together. We are especially indebted to Hailu Fulass and Mekru Teferra and others for reading and commenting on the preliminary draft.

Highlights

Refugees:	Hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians have been forced to flee their country by a repressive regime, a civil war, and an international conflict.
The Land & The People:	Ethiopia is a highland plateau cut by deep river valleys and bordered by seas, deserts, and jungles. Ethiopians have diverse backgrounds and speak many languages.
History:	Through their long history Ethiopia's people have been largely free from outside domination.
Culture:	Ethiopians have developed a unique culture as evidenced by styles of food, dress, time measurement, and literature that are purely Ethiopian in nature.
Ethiopians in America:	Ethiopians in African refugee camps are for the most part illiterate and desperate. By contrast, the few who have made their way to the United States are educated and anxious to get on with their lives. For all, however, the future is unknown.

I. Introduction

The large number of Ethiopian refugees who are currently in camps in Somalia and the Sudan (estimated at nearly 1.5 million) have fled Ethiopia to escape any of the following: (1) civil war between inhabitants of the northern Ethiopian province of Eritrea and the central government of the country, (2) a war being waged between Ethiopia and Somalia over a territorial dispute between the two countries, and (3) a repressive regime that is attempting to revolutionize the social structure of the country and destroy any opposition to its effort. A severe famine in many parts of the country, caused by on-going drought, mismanagement of resources, and civil unrest has also caused thousands of Ethiopians to abandon their homes.

Among Third World countries, Ethiopia has a comparatively poor standard of living and a very high illiteracy rate. Therefore, the Ethiopians found in African refugee camps are for the most part poor, illiterate people. Most Ethiopians who have reached the United States, however, came from a small segment of Ethiopian society that is well educated. They left Ethiopia because of the civil war or because they feared political persecution from the current Ethiopian government.

The exact number of Ethiopians in the United States is not known, but estimates range from 15,000 to 40,000. The majority of these people are not officially classified as refugees; they arrived here with student or tourist visas. Many actually came to the United States as students but are unable to return to Ethiopia because of the subsequent change in political circumstances in the country. Others were forced to leave Ethiopia but were not able to acquire immigrant visas nor to be classified as refugees. These people have entered the country with temporary resident status. Currently, there is no general policy for reclassifying Ethiopians living in exile in this country. Each case is handled individually, and processing can take years.

At the same time, the Ethiopians themselves are unsure of their intentions. They come from a country that is unique in many ways. Though it is in the news of late, Ethiopia is not well known to the outside world.

II. The Country and Its People

Ethiopia is situated in eastern Africa, north of Kenya, between the countries of Somalia, on the Indian Ocean, and the Sudan. The country is predominantly highland plateau cut by deep river gorges and split by the Rift Valley, a trough that runs from southern Africa to Syria. This topography has kept the people of Ethiopia relatively free from outside domination while they developed a culture marked by both national norms and regional differences.

The People

The people of Ethiopia speak some 70 different languages. Most of these belong to the Afro-Asiatic family of languages spoken in the Middle East and across northern Africa. There are two important language groups within this language family with regard to Ethiopia. One of these consists of Semitic languages such as Amharic, Tegrinia and Tigre, which are closely related to Arabic and Hebrew. The other group is the Cushitic languages spoken by the Oromo, or Galla, people. These languages are similar to Somali. There are many languages spoken in Ethiopia that are not in the Afro-Asiatic family, but these are spoken by small populations in isolated regions of the country.

Among these various language groups, the most influential have been the speakers of the Semitic languages. These people lived in the north central plateau of the country. Their highland terrain protected them from outside invasion but also prevented them from unifying into a national cohesive force. The result was that strong regional identifications developed in distinct areas with distinct languages. Local allegiances were directed to regional leaders who came to assume the title of local or tribal king. Wars among regional groups were common. Occasionally one of these kings was able to impose hegemony over most if not all of the other regional kings, earning the title King of Kings. In these cases a national identity would form, feudal in nature and maintained by individual personalities and temporary agreements among regional leaders. A general culture was formed among the various Semitic-speaking people based on common origin, and was perpetuated by intermarriage among the nobility of the various regions and customs. At the same time, however, regional identities were maintained, marked by regional languages and military allegiance to regional leaders.

The Cushitic speakers inhabit a crescent-shaped area lying across the southern part of the country's highlands. Among the Cushitic speakers there are various groups or tribes of people called Oromos, or Gallas, with many different languages and dialects. Some of these groups have unique life styles and customs. Others follow a more typical Ethiopian life style similar to that of the Semitic-speaking people. Although they are perhaps the most numerous among the people of Ethiopia, the Oromos historically have had relatively little influence on the political situation in the country. For the most part they have been dominated by Semitic-speaking people and have formed a kind of tenant farming class in those parts of the country where they are found.

The people found along the eastern, southern and western borders of the country do not represent any common group. They have widely differing backgrounds and life customs. What they share is a lack of involvement in traditional Ethiopian culture

and history, and they have had very little contact with central Ethiopian administrative authority. These border people include such diverse groups as the Danakil, who live in the eastern desert, and societies situated in the tropical southwestern regions of the country. As individual groups, these people are politically and socially isolated. They have little influence on and are little influenced by the mainstream of Ethiopian life. Moreover, their histories have had little involvement with the events that have shaped the history of Ethiopia as a whole. However, because they find themselves within the borders of the country, they have been suddenly caught up in the interests and power struggles of Ethiopia and its neighbors.

History

A complete history of the people of Ethiopia would require analysis of all of its people from their origins to their current situations vis-a-vis modern-day Ethiopia and its neighbors, an endeavor beyond the scope of this Fact Sheet. However, Ethiopia's political history has been dominated by events in the evolution of the Semitic-speaking people mentioned above. Their history is therefore summarized here.

It is not known exactly where these people originated. One theory is that they migrated from Arabia. According to Ethiopian legend, the Queen of Sheba came from Ethiopia, and her son was the first Ethiopian king. It is known that Ethiopians (or Abyssinians, as they were sometimes called) traded with the ancient Egyptians. They were never conquered by the ancient Mediterranean empires.

Christianity arrived in Ethiopia in the second century A.D. with missionaries from the Coptic Church of Alexandria, Egypt (one of the four main centers of Christianity in the Roman world). The religion was apparently adopted by the Ethiopians as a result of missionary zeal and political persuasion, since the country was never under the political domination of the Romans. Nevertheless, Christianity was adopted across the country, and its influence has been significant and continuous to the present.

The expansion of the Islamic Empire surrounded Ethiopia with Moslem-dominated countries. By 700 A.D. the Ethiopians were cut off from the rest of the Christian world. However, the Islamic armies never conquered the predominantly Christian, highland Ethiopian people. Ethiopian rulers and the majority of the highland people remained Christian, though there is a sizeable Moslem population in the country. The exact ratio of Christians to Moslems is not known.

For the most part, Ethiopia managed to withstand the more recent waves of invasion, when European countries swept Africa during the 19th and early 20th centuries in an effort to establish colonial empires. The Horn of Africa, where Ethiopia is located, was one of the last parts of the continent to catch the interest of the

Europeans. With the opening of the Suez Canal, however, access to the Red Sea suddenly assumed importance. Britain held dominance in the Sudan on Ethiopia's western border and controlled British Somalia on Ethiopia's eastern border as well. Although they once sent an expeditionary force into the country to save a British citizen, the British did not attempt to take over the Ethiopian highlands. The Italians did try. They established the colony of Italian Somalia on Ethiopia's southern border and endeavored to conquer Ethiopia from the north as well. In the late 1800's an Italian army was soundly defeated by an Ethiopian army in the battle of Adowa. This marked the only time that a major European army was defeated by an African army, and it preserved central Ethiopia as the only territory on the continent of Africa which was not under European domination. However, in the peace treaty following this battle, the province of Ethiopia that borders the Red Sea was ceded to Italy. This province, known as Eritrea, was governed by the Italians for some 70 years.

In the 1930's, Mussolini used the defeat at Adowa as an excuse to invade Ethiopia again, this time from its colonies both south and north of the country. The Italians managed to overcome formal Ethiopian resistance and actually ruled the main centers of the country for nearly five years. However, during this period the Ethiopians continuously resisted Italian domination with guerrilla warfare. With British assistance, they expelled the Italians in the early 1940's. At this time, with the support of a UN-organized referendum, the province of Eritrea was formally rejoined to Ethiopia with certain provisions allotted to the Eritreans for local self-rule. Ethiopia has been free of external invasion ever since.

The internal political history of the country has been characterized by numerous civil wars and shifting centers of power, predominantly among the Semitic-speaking people. In ancient times, the administrative center of the country is believed to have been in the northern city of Axum. Later, the central authority was held by people who lived southwest of Axum. Their capital was a city called Godar. The palaces built in Godar were similar in many ways to contemporary structures in Europe and the Middle East, indicating that some contact did take place between Ethiopia and the outside world. Between these periods of central administration, the country experienced periods when regional leaders were autonomous. This resulted in the emergence of a warrior class with allegiance to local leaders. These leaders in turn schemed, manipulated and fought among themselves for supremacy. This process resulted in a feudal system where the reward for victory in battle was land and revenue from the people who worked the land. Individual power and prestige were initially based on regional support and were extended through regional alliances formed for mutual benefit. Intermarriage between leading families of separate re-

gions was often arranged to acknowledge and cement alliances between them.

Toward the end of the last century, a leader of the Amharic-speaking people was able to subdue his rivals and assume the title of King of Kings. The name he took upon achieving this position was Menelik II. Under his rule and that of his successor, Haile Selassie, the Amharas established dominance over the country. This process was helped by Selassie's success in ultimately expelling the Italians. When he returned to power after the Italian defeat, Selassie was able to consolidate his power by placing his supporters, primarily Amharas, in positions of power throughout the country. Moreover, Amharas became the landlords in areas of the country inhabited by Oromos and border minorities. Amharic, the language of the Amharas, became the national language. Addis Ababa, a city built by Menelik, became the capital city and far and away the most influencial city in the country. Under Menelik II and Haile Selassie, Ethiopian culture came to exhibit many traits of Amharic culture. This served to unify the country and helped to build national institutions for education and defense. At the same time many Ethiopians resented Amhara dominance and desired to maintain the traditions and languages of their own regions.

Haile Selassie ruled through shrewd political maneuvering, keeping his would-be rivals divided among themselves and concentrating the power of the government in a few, loyal individuals. While balancing his traditional rivals, he also attempted to establish a power base directly loyal to his government and the idea of Ethiopia as a nation. He established a national army, a national navy and a national air force, as well as his elite palace guard. Officers in these military units were assigned to duty away from their home areas, leading troops that did not come from their own regions or tribes. Haile Selassie succeeded in establishing a military power that was national in its outlook, although it proved to be his undoing. The coup which took place in 1974 was led by officers from the national armed forces.

The Current Situation

The coup came after years of unrest around the country. Various political elements within the country were pushing for change. The Eritreans had been in open revolt for several years against central authority and wanted to establish Eritrea as an independent state. The middle class was dissatisfied and frustrated at the corruption and the wealth being amassed by the landowners associated with the government. The students in the country, together with the army, sought more equal distribution of the country's wealth through a socialization process, as was occurring in many African countries at that time. The event which precipitated the coup was the sudden public awareness of the terrible extent to which famine had hit several places in the country. The government had tried to suppress news of the famine, while taking little or no action to relieve the suffering caused by drought. Rebellion occurred,

apparently spontaneously, throughout the country and from many factions of the population. In the turbulence that followed, a group of minor military officers seized power and terminated the monarchy.

This group, called the Derg, attempted to abruptly change the situation in the country in many ways. Those who had been in power under Haile Selassie were immediately executed. Measures for reform in both land and social organization were instituted in the cities and villages of the country. Resistance of any kind was forceably quieted. The new government was philosophically oriented toward socialism and resentful of assistance given the Haile Selassie government by the United States. Therefore, U.S. projects and assistance in the country were stopped and replaced with assistance from the Soviet Union and Cuba.

Today Ethiopia is plagued by unrest of many kinds and divisions on various fronts. A protracted war is being waged on the eastern frontier of the country with Somalia over territorial disputes. The Eritreans continue to wage a civil war for autonomy, a war which has been in process for more than a decade. Much of the country is governed by martial law, while various clandestine groups strive to oppose the current government's hold on power. Some of these groups represent the old tribal interests which are still very strong in the country. Others represent student and business interests anxious to bring about changes in the country that will give them greater opportunities. The government, with considerable foreign support, has viciously attempted to crush all of these forms of opposition. The result has been a high loss of life in the country and the forced exile of large numbers of Ethiopians of various backgrounds and ethnic identities.

Several hundred thousand people have fled the fighting between Somalia and Ethiopia, becoming refugees in Somalia. Thousands more are refugees from the Eritrean war or students who oppose the current Ethiopian government and have sought refuge in the Sudan. Some of these refugees were forced to flee from their homes because they found themselves in the midst of conflicts in which they had no part. The vast majority of these refugees are uneducated. They are under the care of officials in the countries of first asylum and international refugee relief organizations. The hope is that somehow the conflicts that drove them from their homes will be resolved and that they will be able to return to their homes and resume their lives.

For the most part, the Ethiopians in the United States are people who were forced to flee Ethiopia for political reasons. Some were members of old ruling elites, or the offspring of these people. Some opposed the current Ethiopian regime and were forced to leave the country or face persecution. Many are students who left Ethiopia to complete their education and now face uncertain situations

if they return to the country. As a group they tend to be quite well educated with considerable talent to offer to their country (if they should ever be allowed to return) or to a country which grants them political asylum.

Culture and Society

The high plateau country of Ethiopia is extremely fertile, and the majority of the population makes its living directly from the land. Under Haile Selassie most of the land was owned by absentee landlords, and perhaps 90% of the population was engaged in subsistence farming. People tend to live in small compounds of one or two families on the land they work, rather than in more centralized villages. There are few towns of any size except for Addis Ababa, which numbers perhaps a million, and Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, which has about half of that population. The small towns that dot the countryside traditionally serve as market centers for the surrounding farmers. A few of these also have government elementary schools.

Farm productivity depends on the rainfall, which is seasonal. Ethiopia is on the western end of the monsoon system, and most of the rain falls between June and August each year. The land is too contoured for irrigation except in lowlands along the Rift Valley. Lately, the monsoon rains have been light, and sections of the country are suffering from prolonged and severe drought.

Ethiopian families are very strong. Most of the work in the field is done by the men; women help with weeding. Women usually work in their home compounds, where they make nearly all the food and clothing for their families. Babies are spoiled until they are about three or four years of age, when they become shepherds. From then on, they are given low status until they reach adulthood. Marriages are usually arranged between families. Ethiopian women tend to marry at a young age and are usually six to ten years younger than their husbands. For the most part there are no family names. Children take their fathers' names as their second names. When girls marry they change titles, but keep their fathers' names.

The most important events in the life of the family are weddings and funerals. To enable each family to finance these events, at which food and drink are lavished on large numbers of family guests, societies are formed among groups of families. Each society owns the paraphernalia necessary for a large social celebration--including tents, benches and chairs, and cooking utensils. Money is collected from each family at one event to pay for the next. In this way each society member is assured of a large wedding or funeral as the need arises.

Religion

For those Ethiopians who are Christian, family life is closely tied to the church. Church worship includes pre-Christian animistic rituals as well as rituals

based on Christian dogma as practiced in the Coptic Church. In every church, services are conducted on Sundays and on the day set aside for the patron saint of the church. In addition, Wednesdays and Fridays are considered holy days to be observed by fasting. According to the rules of the fast, no food is consumed before noon, and no meat or dairy products of any kind are eaten on those days. The most important national holidays also commemorate Christian events. The celebration of Mescal, held in September, commemorates the finding in Ethiopia of the cross on which Christ was crucified and marks the beginning of the Ethiopian year. Christmas is celebrated on January 7th, and Temkut, which commemorates the baptism of Christ, comes two weeks later. Most Ethiopians consider Temkut the more important of the two holidays. Easter is observed in the spring, usually a week later than when Easter falls according to the Gregorian calendar of the West. The last important religious holiday is the feast of St. Mary, in mid-summer.

The church has considerable influence in the local communities where its priests live much as their followers do. Under Haile Selassie's government, the heads of the church had considerable wealth and influence over events that shaped national policy. Since 1974, the national power of the church has declined.

It has been estimated that Moslems constitute as much as 50% of the population of Ethiopia. However, their greatest concentrations are around the periphery of the country and in the market towns. Historically, the Moslems have not owned land, which has been the source of wealth and power in the country. Therefore, relative to their numbers, the Moslems have had very little power or influence. This has been one of the causes for the civil war being waged in Eritrea, where a large percentage of the population is Moslem. There are Moslem factions within the Eritrean liberation movement which see independence for the province as an opportunity for Islam to have a stronger role in the affairs of the province.

Both major religions instilled in their congregations a respect for education and literacy. The Bible of the Ethiopian Church is written in Ge'ez, an ancient Ethiopian language from which the modern Semitic languages spoken in the country developed. The Church maintained local schools for the children of the faithful throughout the country and taught them to read Ge'ez. The Moslem holy book, The Koran, is written in Arabic, which Moslem parents have traditionally encouraged their children to learn to read. Thus, the concept of formal education to develop literacy has been traditionally maintained, although only a small percentage of the population can actually read and write.

Time

Because of the isolation of the country from outside influences both eastern and western, Ethiopian culture has developed many unique aspects. Their system

of time, for example, begins with sunrise each day. One o'clock means either an hour after sunrise or an hour after sunset. Their calendar begins in September. It consists of 12 months, each with 30 days, and a thirteenth month which has five days; leap year it has six.

Food

Ethiopian food is based on a staple grain called teff which only grows in Ethiopia. Teff is made into a dough which is allowed to ferment before it is cooked into a flat pancake-like bread called enjera. This is then eaten with any of various kinds of stew called wat. Wats can be made of meat or vegetables, and can be very highly spiced.

Clothing

Ethiopian women traditionally wear white dresses, while men wear white tunics over riding pants. The distinctive part of Ethiopian dress is a large white cloth worn by both men and women over their shoulders. The cloth can be draped in many styles. Heavy cloth is worn for warmth; it is called a gabby. Light gauze-like cloth is worn for dress occasions; it is called a natella. The natella usually has a very colorful border on it, which is also found near the bottom hem of the women's dress.

Language and Social Interaction

Amharic is the national language of Ethiopia. It is spoken by approximately one-third of Ethiopia's 25,000,000 people. It is the most widely-spoken language in Ethiopia and the language most likely to be known by Ethiopian refugees in the United States. Amharic is the language of government and is used as the principal medium of instruction in primary and secondary schools in Ethiopia.

There are four other languages of considerable importance used in Ethiopia. These are Galla (Oromo), spoken by about 7,000,000; Tigrinya, spoken by 3,500,000; Geez, a liturgical language used in the Ethiopian orthodox (Coptic) Church and having an influence on spoken languages in Ethiopia somewhat similar to that of Latin on Western European languages; and English, a language used as a medium of instruction in schools throughout the country and the most commonly used language for international communication.

Amharic is written in a syllabary of South Semitic origin. Unlike an alphabet, a syllabary involves the use of letters each of which represents a syllable. Each consonant of the language can be written in seven different forms, one for each of the seven vowels occurring in the language. Thus the Amharic syllabary has some 250 symbols, each one standing for a consonant-vowel combination. The following are 14 Amharic letters in two consonant groups with approximate English equivalent sounds:

ካ ኩ ኪ ካ ኬ ክ ኮ ዘ ዙ ዚ ዛ ዜ ዝ ዞ
ka ku ki kä ke kə ko za zu zi zä ze zə zo

Words are separated by two dots (:), sentences are terminated by four dots (::). No distinction is made between lower-case and upper-case (capital) letters. The Ethiopian syllabary is used for writing Amharic, Geez and Tigrinya.

Ethiopian literature contains a rhetorical technique, called Wax and Gold, rarely employed in English. Using this technique, the author portrays a surface story which is obvious and directly presented (the Wax); but implied in the author's words, and being told along with the surface story, is a second story, more profound and important than the first (the Gold). The understanding of the Gold requires a complete knowledge of the language and the meanings of established idiomatic expressions.

The concept of Wax and Gold is an important one for Ethiopian culture and social interaction. Considerable attention is given to overt behavior. Greetings are extended and warm when Ethiopians meet. Attention and respect are shown in everyday acts such as walking through a doorway together or rejoining a group after having been called away. Ethiopian hosts are hospitable to a fault; Ethiopian guests are careful not to take advantage of their host's generosity while being most appreciative of every kindness. All the while, however, the Ethiopian is on the alert for hidden meaning, the underlying aim behind the actions of others. Those who earn respect are those who are able to mask their true feelings and expose themselves the least.

III. Educational Background

As mentioned above, both the Ethiopian Church and Islam encouraged traditional literacy training. However, such training reached a very small percentage of the population, and it was done for religious purposes in languages that are not used in day-to-day activities.

Haile Selassie initiated a program of secular public education in the country in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Secondary schools were built in the provincial capitals of the country, and elementary schools in many of the smaller towns. Education was essentially free, but the schools were not easily accessible to most of the population, so most students had to fend for themselves away from their homes to get an education.

Originally all instruction was conducted in English, from elementary school through the university. In the late 1960's the language of instruction for the primary schools was changed from English to Amharic, but English continues to be the language of instruction in secondary schools and in the university. Subject content was not always meaningful to the students, and a

rote system of learning was the rule. The drop-out ratio in these schools was very high, due to the hardships many of the students had to endure in order to study, and due to a difficult examination system that weeded students out after the 6th, 8th, and 12th grades. Fewer than 5% reached the university.

IV. Implications for Teaching ESL

Since Ethiopian refugees are most likely to know Amharic, what follows is a brief overview of some of the characteristics of Amharic that might prove the source of problems for an Amharic-speaker learning English.

1. Amharic Pronunciation

- Amharic stress

Stress is almost evenly distributed on each syllable in Amharic. In English there are various degrees of stress with a particular syllable in each multi-syllable English word stressed more strongly than all the other syllables in a word. In particular, note the following pairs of words that are distinguished (in part) by the placement of stress: 'export (noun)--ex'port (verb)
'permit (noun)--per'mit (verb)
Not only does English have a very strong stress, but its place in a word can be used to distinguish pairs of words. This will be a particular problem for an Amharic-speaker learning English.

- Amharic vowels

Amharic has 7 vowels. They relate to English vowels as follows:

1. a as in the word ago.
2. u as in the word lunar but shorter.
3. i as in the word ski but shorter.
4. ȧ as in the word father but shorter.
5. e as in the word hey but shorter.
6. ə (or u) somewhat like the vowel sound in put.
7. o as in the word tone but shorter.

Since English has a more complex vowel system than Amharic, Amharic-speaking English learners will have several pronunciation difficulties with English vowels. The most noticeable problem is for them to distinguish between related long and short English vowel sounds such as it and eat, shut and shoot, and bet and bait.

A second vowel problem is to pronounce English vowels not found in Amharic. The most difficult of these are the æ sound found in the words bat, cat, etc., and the ɔ sound found in caught, bought, etc.

Amharic has a rule of vowel insertion that is used to break up clusters of three or more consonants. The vowel ə is inserted in such cases, and one

might expect an Amharic-speaker to make the following errors in English:

ten trucks pronounced as ten ə trucks
large trees pronounced as large ə trees
English class pronounced as English ə class

- Amharic consonants

Amharic has sounds that correspond more or less to English consonants. However, Amharic voiceless stops (sounds similar to English p, t, and k) are not produced with any noticeable degree of aspiration, unlike English voiceless stops that are very aspirated, particularly before stressed vowels. (Aspiration refers to the puff of air that is produced in English when words like pie, tie, and coo are pronounced in English.)

Amharic has very few initial consonant clusters. The following clusters do appear in Amharic: bl- br- gl- gr- kr- and tr- . Therefore, clusters that appear in English but not in Amharic are potential learning problems. Clusters beginning with s- are a particular problem. Many Amharic-speakers will introduce a vowel in front of the s-cluster: əspin. An additional vowel may be inserted to break up three consonant clusters--which do not occur in Amharic words. All of this indicates that special attention will have to be given to teaching initial clusters, especially those beginning with s-.

2. Amharic Syntax

Amharic puts words together to form sentences in ways that are strikingly different from English; these ways can be expected to cause problems for the Amharic-speaker learning English. The following are some of the more salient problems:

- In Amharic, the verb usually comes at the end of the sentence. A common pattern is subject + object + verb:

wəndəmme bet-un gezza

"my-brother house-the (he) bought" = "My brother bought the house." English typically uses subject + verb + object sentence patterns. An additional complication is that Amharic has what is called 'scrambling rules'. This means that the major parts of an Amharic sentence can be switched around for stylistic and discourse reasons. English has 'fixed-word order.' The Amharic-speaker will have to learn that English does not allow the basic word-order to be switched around.

- Amharic does not have articles corresponding to the English words a, an, and the. Instead, they add a suffix to a word to indicate reference to a specific or definite thing (e.g. the house - betu.) This is complicated when a noun has an adjective modifier because the suffix is added to the adjective (e.g. the small house - tənnəsu bet).

In English, the use of the articles a, an, and the is quite complex. The can show definiteness with all nouns but a/an must be used with singular nouns not made definite. (Contrast a book and the book.) A/An, however, cannot be used with plural nouns (books and the books) or with non-count nouns (Sugar and the sugar). The use of English articles is a very difficult problem for Amharic speakers.

- The sequence of items in comparative structures differs between Amharic and English. In Amharic, the sequence is Y - than - X - strong is; in English it is X is stronger than Y.

- Negation in Amharic is indicated by the use of a prefix and a suffix, both placed on the verb:

səbbər	'he broke'
al-səbbərə-m	'he didn't break'

In English, there is a complex system for indicating negation (essentially, not or n't is placed before the verb with the use of the auxiliary do: I went, I didn't go; with auxiliaries and the verb be, it is placed after: I may go, I may not go; I am here, I am not here). Since English not only indicates negation differently from Amharic, but does it in a more complicated way, it can be expected that the Amharic-speaker will have considerable problems in learning the correct formation of negation in English.

- Questions are formed in Amharic either by the use of a question-word, which need not occur initially in the sentence, or, in the case of yes-no questions, by using rising intonation or by adding a particle to the end of the sentence. All forms for question formation can be expected to be a particular problem for the Amharic-speaker learning English.

- Grammatical gender is a problem since in Amharic there is a two-way distinction, and in English there is a three-way. That is, Amharic does not have the category of neutral (corresponding to the pronoun it) gender.

- One last major difference between English and Amharic that will be noted here is that Amharic has relative clauses placed before the nouns they modify. This means that in the Amharic equivalent of the sentence I saw the man who arrived early, the relative clause (..who arrived early) may be placed before the noun it modifies: (I saw who arrived early the man.) This will be a source of problems for the Amharic-speaker learning English.

V. Implications for Cultural Orientation

Like most of the refugees in this country, the Ethiopians who are here are not here by choice. The overwhelming majority of them would eagerly return to

Ethiopia if they felt that they were able to live there free from danger and were able to lead productive lives.

Perhaps more than any other people, Ethiopians feel isolated and lost away from their country. This is due in large measure to the isolation which their culture has developed. Outside of Ethiopia, they are alone. They are not part of any larger ethnic identity. They are neither Black Africans nor Arab Africans. Historically very few Ethiopians have come to settle in this country. Therefore, there is no local community with which these Ethiopian refugees feel an affinity. Their customs and way of life are different from other cultures and restricted to the environment of Ethiopia. Consequently, it is difficult for them to duplicate their life style in the United States. For example, the grain for their bread is not grown in this country.

Finally, the status of the Ethiopian refugee in this country is often the source of considerable anxiety. As highly educated and/or highly born Ethiopians, they had come to expect a role of leadership in their own society. Many endured hardship and privation to get an education in the belief that it would enable them to have good jobs in positions of leadership in Ethiopia. In the United States these positions are not readily available, and the Ethiopians are obliged to take menial jobs. In addition, they suffer from discrimination because they are foreign and because of their skin color. Furthermore, when they accept menial jobs, they are resented by unemployed native Americans.

For those Ethiopians who are not able to acquire permanent resident status--and these represent the majority of Ethiopians in the United States--the problems are compounded. No regular guidelines are followed in the processing of these people's requests to stay in the United States. Temporary permission to stay is usually granted, but is accompanied with restrictions and the possibility of deportation. Each case is processed individually and slowly.

For all of these reasons the biggest problem for the Ethiopian refugee is intense depression. The depression is difficult to overcome because the Ethiopians cannot get compensation in the United States for what they have left behind in Ethiopia. They are torn by indecision and uncertainty--whether they will be able to return to Ethiopia in the near future, or whether they should invest effort and resources to build a future in the United States.

References

Armbruster, C. H. Initia Amharica - An Introduction to Spoken Amharic. Part I: Grammar. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1908. xxiii.

Barton, Donald K. and Taddese Begene. Fundamentals of Amharic. Rev. ed. Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah, 1967, 3 vols. Tapes.

Bender, Marvin L., and Charles A. Ferguson, et al. Language in Ethiopia. London: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Cooper, Robert L., and Susan Carpenter. Linguistic Diversity in the Ethiopian Market. In Fishman, Joshua A. editor, Advances in the Sociology of Languages. The Hague, Mouton, 1972. Pages 255 to 267.

Frydenlund, Marie and Kristine Swensen. Amharic for beginners. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Norwegian Lutheran Mission Language School, 1967.

_____. Amharic Textbook. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968, xviii.

Leslau, Wolf. An Amharic Reference Grammar. Los Angeles, CA: University of California at Los Angeles, Dept. of Near Eastern and African Languages, 1969. 478 pp. ED 036 793 MF only

_____. An Amharic Dictionary: Amharic-English, English-Amharic. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1964.

_____. A Basic Amharic Dictionary. Amharic-English and English-Amharic. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Forthcoming.

Levine, N. Wax and Gold: Traditions & Innovations in Ethiopian Culture. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1965.

Lipsky, George A. Ethiopia: Its People Its Society Its Culture. New Haven: Human Relations Ara Files Press, 1962, pp. 52-56.